

AREA 2:

CREATING AND PRESENTING

Chapter 1

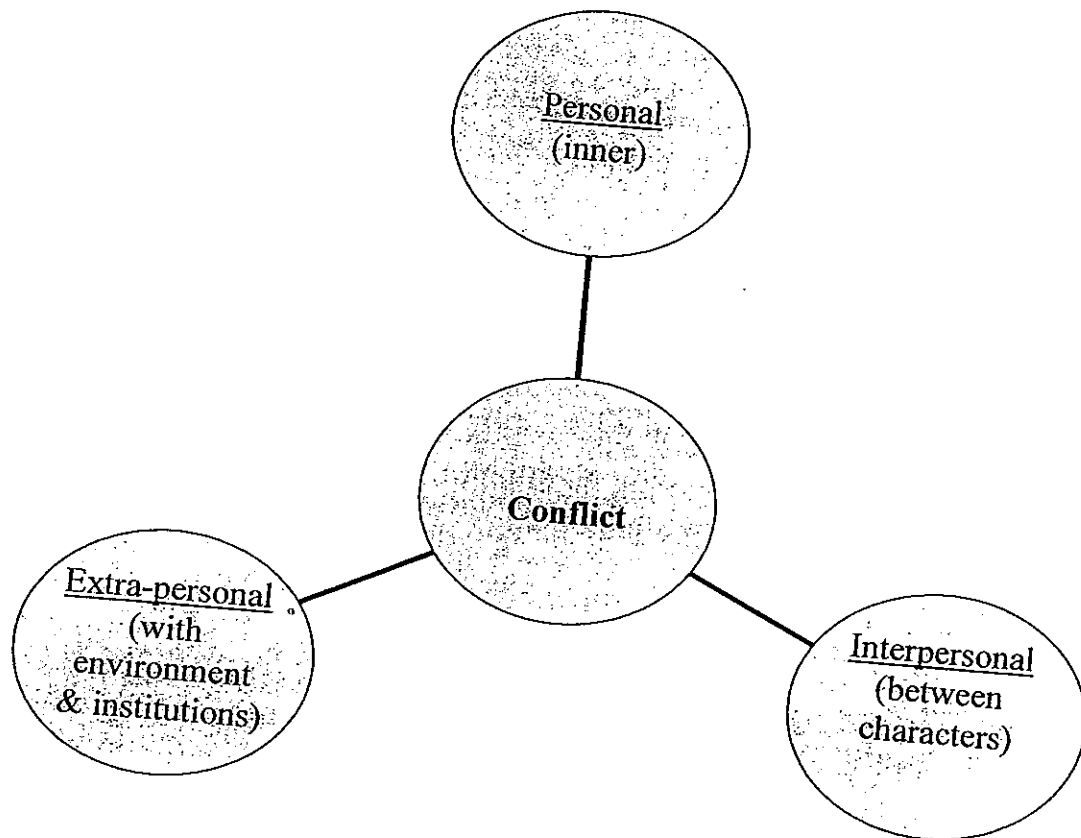
UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Conflict is inevitably encountered by all humans in different ways. Consider the types of conflicts faced by individuals: personal conflict, interpersonal conflict and extra-personal conflict. The study of this Context requires an understanding of a range of conflicts including moral dilemmas, differences with immediate others and social unrest, such as war. However, it is imperative to also consider the various ways in which people 'encounter' conflict in their lives and how they deal with and resolve the battles and challenges they face as a result of particular conflicts.

It is necessary to define the phrase 'encountering conflict'. 'Conflict' may be defined as a clash, disagreement or battle between two or more parties. It may be driven by the need to survive or by contrasting opinions, principles, ideologies or modes of survival. It may be constituted by psychological distress, contradictory political views or armed warfare. Also, it is valuable to consider the antonyms of 'conflict', such as peace, harmony, agreement and reconciliation.

To 'encounter' conflict may be an unexpected or chance meeting with an adversary in confrontation or combat. The people involved in conflict may be perpetrators or victims. Whether they cause or are consequently affected by conflict, individuals are largely influenced by their values and beliefs. Culture, religion, history and family actively manipulate the behaviour of individuals in both their contributions to conflict and their reactions to conflict.

Conflicts occur on many levels. In film and literature they are often characterised by a clash between good and evil. However, in real life the distinction between good and evil is not always clearly defined and a conflict may arise from a difference of opinion or a varied angle of perception. Individuals must understand and make choices between hate, arrogance, intolerance, superiority, greed and anger or compassion, tolerance, empathy, kindness, love, kindness, generosity and peace.





1.1 Personal Conflict

The inner conflicts of an individual may embody a personal dilemma of a moral nature. Inevitably the individual will have to make a choice in order to resolve and shed the emotional residue of the personal conflict or pursue an emotional battle. The decisions made by individuals may not only create a personal struggle but may change the direction of their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. Internal conflict arises from making personal choices and can lead to feelings of indecisiveness, confusion or anxiety. An individual may find themselves in an arena of inner conflict when they feel a need for others to recognise that something is important to them.

Personal beliefs and values contribute to shaping the identity of an individual, which influences personality, cognitive and physical behaviour. There is less potential for conflict when people share complementary value systems. In contrast, people who believe strongly in a value may welcome confrontation. Individual priorities and preferences may also lead people into conflict of a personal nature, such as a battle of conscience or a concern for displeasing others. At the ethical core of personal conflict is trust.

The dispositions and temperaments of individuals may influence their decisions and behaviour which will inevitably impact on those around them. Dispositional tendencies and established personality traits, such as being agreeable or harbouring high levels of personal negativity, will impact on the conflict management styles preferred by an individual. Those who have a personal negative view may easily become dominated in interactions or appear detached from dispute resolutions. Some may acquire greater confidence and a clearer sense of identity. Through personal conflicts, people learn more about themselves and others, thus they grow. Furthermore, personal reactions to trauma and change as a result of conflict may lead to greater personal strength and may alter the values that have been guiding factors.

When people pursue private and personal interests, the consequences may benefit the individual and their family. Conversely, the personal objectives of individuals may clash or one's personal goals and desires may affect the extent to which they accept or neglect their responsibilities. Personal interests may influence and interfere with judgements with beneficial or detrimental effects on the lives of individuals and their loved ones. An individual's capacity to make objective judgments may be reduced when personal interests cloud obligations, reason and objectivity. People may act on their personal interests when changing their job or career for more income or for greater satisfaction and the consequences may provide some improvement to their lives. However, when people neglect or disregard their responsibilities and ethical duties in their pursuit of personal interests, a situation of conflict may arise.

The desire for power is an aspect of our inherent competitive human nature. Individuals may strive for power in any setting in which there are competing interests. Conflict may arise as individuals or groups try to gain advantage over one another. In order to survive, humans will make sacrifices and act in their own best interests. Human instinct dictates that one acts to preserve one's own human life.

One's conflict management style is deemed to have a proportional impact on the extent to which they experience conflict in their personal environment. The strategies an individual utilises in managing conflict largely depend on emotional intelligence, stress management and capacity to accommodate compromise and stand firm. Individuals may encounter inner conflict in their relationships with family and friends, in their professional life or in their civic life. On a personal level, if an individual is open to additional possibilities, factors such as miscommunication, fear and assumption may be less pervasive and damaging. The resolutions of ongoing tensions may stimulate either cooperative or antagonistic behaviour.

1.2 Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflicts may occur between family members, between neighbours or within groups in the community. Relationships may be weakened or strengthened by conflict. In resolving interpersonal conflict, both parties must collaborate to find an acceptable solution that is mutually satisfactory. Approaches that embody fairness and equal participation are most likely to last. Effective communication and empathy are essential.

Conflicts between loved ones, such as family and friends, parents and children and between marital spouses, may stem from an inner conflict. Personal issues may be projected into the relationship and exacerbate interpersonal relationships. One's behaviour can contribute to interpersonal problems when an individual's focus on their personal interests damages a personal or professional relationship. Opposing beliefs, opinions and values may also be sources of conflict within relationships.

Conflict occurs in healthy relationships, but can force a relationship to come to a painful end. External conflict can lead to feelings of anger, hurt, fear, jealousy, resentment and hostility. Honesty, respect and trust are core factors that contribute to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts. The end of relationships may cause further conflict, particularly if there has been a betrayal, a battle for pride or disappointed expectations.

Methods of resolving interpersonal conflicts will impact significantly on relationships. Individuals may choose to avoid a conflict if they perceive confrontation will cause them significant loss or change. People who find it difficult to assert themselves or control their emotions may be reluctant to acknowledge that a conflict exists. Individual differences and opposite character traits may also hinder the resolution of conflict within relationships. However, avoidance strategies will eventually cause further tension in interactions and denial can lead to even greater conflict in the future.

More competitive approaches involve the use or abuse of power to manipulate the conflict in their favour. This can exacerbate distrust between parties and hinder long-term conflict resolution. In a school or work setting, conflict in the form of bullying may arise as a result of a struggle for attention from peers, family members or colleagues. Alternatively, bullying may be the manifestation of a power struggle. The duration of the victimisation of an individual by a bully depends on the way in which the conflict is managed and resolved. Often, a third party can help to assuage the personal issues impacting on the negative relationship.

1.3 Extra-personal Conflict

Conflicts which have an impact on society may stem from the political, religious, cultural and social beliefs of the people. Political conflicts in which national sovereignty and interests are defended at the expense of other nations may have international, national and local impacts.

Competing national interests may culminate in battles of war to attain resources, particularly oil. This was demonstrated during the Gulf War of the early 1990s when Iraq invaded Kuwait. This led to a multinational response led by the United States of America, who also had a vested interest in the outcome given their reliance on oil for their industrial needs. Economic and trade factors can have a significant impact on both triggering and resolving wars between nations.

Citizenship entails both social rights and responsibilities, generally instituted by political and security forces which are expected to bring perpetrators of the law to justice. Authoritative institutions such as governments and police bodies carry a social responsibility to defend the human rights of citizens. Denial of essential human freedoms, including constitutional rights to freedom of expression, privacy and 'a fair trial' may be adversely or advantageously affected by one's social class. Denial of opportunity may be afforded to those of lower social status. Nonetheless, conflict that may ensue from refusal of justice may bring individuals within a community together in a common cause, but cause further dissension against the governing body.

Historically, religious faith has inspired much persecution of those who share a certain faith. The Protestants were perceived as a threat to the Catholics in the seventeenth century and Jews and Palestinians continue fighting in the twenty-first century. The cultural customs and values of a people may clash with those of different nations, hence a possible clash between new settlers in a foreign land and the natives. This conflict is evident in *The Secret River* between British convicts and Aborigines during the colonisation of Australia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Millions of civilians, especially women and children, were killed as a result of use of sophisticated weaponry in bloody conflicts, both between and within countries, in the twentieth century. The tragic impact of such conflict on children is evident in statistical evidence of children making up half the number of refugees in the last two decades.

In global conflicts, a mediating party can be necessary in reaching agreement and resolution. Different cultures and societies hold diverse interests and values. When these are challenged and defended, compromise and negotiation can be difficult. The United Nations is the result of international commitment to peace-keeping, justice and equal rights. The United Nations provides a forum for political debate and assists in negotiating disputes and ceasefires between nations.

The role of diplomacy is paramount in negotiations and communication between different nations and groups. Miscommunication, misinterpretation and misunderstanding can cause cultural and social conflicts to escalate. Acceptance, rather than assumption, is required to facilitate positive communications that may lead to the resolution of an extra-personal conflict.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND

2.1 Religious Conflict

Since the beginning of civilisation, religion has been an instrument used by humans to make sense of their existence. Early Egyptians, Greeks and Romans worshipped many gods though did not share the same gods. Such beliefs in different gods continue to be the source of much global division in our current world. Conflicts stemming from opposing religious beliefs have marred human history through the ages. Major international religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. All have been involved in battles for superiority at some point in history.

Religiously-motivated conflict has brought oppression, intolerance and unjustified discrimination for many innocent civilians, who have been victims of violence, discrimination, violation and forced exodus from their homelands. However, the peace-building and humanitarian efforts of religious groups have also impacted on our world significantly. World Vision is a Christian organisation that provides relief services and increasingly, development strategies and assistance for third world countries. The Quakers are a religious society recognised largely for their commitment to non-violent conflict resolution strategies.

Commitment to religious faith is inextricably intertwined with personal identity. Thus, a perceived attack or threat to one's beliefs is equally a threat to their central being. In religious conflicts, compromise can be very difficult or near impossible when the parties involved seek to protect their right to 'eternal salvation'. Furthermore, the insular expectation that followers will accept the dogmas of their religion without question leaves little room for negotiation and compromise.

Religions are based on interpretations of scriptures, thus conflict and debate can arise as a result of different interpretations. The interpretation that attracts the majority of followers is usually victorious in such conflicts. The moderate views of most religious followers contrast with the views of extremists whose literal interpretations and radical measures can cause conflict to escalate.

Fundamentalist religious groups uphold the most conservative aspects of their respective religions with little tolerance and are dedicated to the preservation of their religious traditions. Evangelical Christianity is often deemed fundamentalist. The Taliban are fundamental Muslims who enforce highly conservative rules which particularly oppress Afghani women and individual freedom. It is often the case that such fundamentalist groups are largely dissatisfied with modernity and seek some form of purification.

Some religious wars are listed below:

- The Israeli and Palestinian conflict is a battle between Jews, Muslims and Christians for 'Holy Land'.
- 'The troubles' in Northern Ireland stemmed partly from the clash between Catholics and Protestants.
- The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a clash between Muslims, Roman Catholics and Serbian Orthodox.
- Cyprus has been divided between Christians and Muslims.
- 'Religious cleansing' in East Timor killed many Christians as Muslim Indonesia sought power.
- Various conflicts in Indonesia have been battles between Christians and Muslims.
- Conflict in India is rife among Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Animists.
- In Sri Lanka, Buddhists and Hindus fight each other for independence.

2.2 Political Conflict

The role of the government is to create policies that will benefit and protect the people that it represents. Governments have a great responsibility to enforce the rules that ensure justice and security for all citizens. Types of government include republican, democratic, communist, monarchy and dictatorship. All Governments are entrusted with the task of acting in the best interests of the nation and the individuals within it, although some do not. Within nations, political parties and organisations debate opposing views and voices. Coalitions are often created in response to a conflict of interests in the direction of governmental policy.

Governments largely seek sustainable approaches to human security. Some invest heavily in military and weaponry defense systems, both as a warning to other nations and civil groups within the nation itself. However, use of police or military force may motivate resentment and civil unrest in the form of protests and civil wars. Threats posed by terrorists trying to achieve their political goals have exposed political judgements and government responses that have led to both greater conflict and peace agreements.

Greed, power and grievances have often marred the actions of governments, which subsequently have been a source of suffering for individuals and social groups. Historically, in periods of political instability, governments have been guilty of discrimination against minorities within their powers. Oppression and persecution that has ensued has caused denial of basic human rights to those most vulnerable.

Economic factors have been both causes of conflict and sources for negotiations of peace. World trade changed and expanded substantially after World War II. Though treaties and legal arrangements were made at this time to reduce trade barriers, the trade of goods and services has increased the divisions between wealthy, industrialised countries and developing nations. Though trade is an important means of raising the living standards within a nation, such benefits have not always spread through the populations of poorer, commodity-trading nations where there has been little industrial development. In developing countries, conflict has stemmed from the inequitable transfer of resources to rural and urban populations.

Peace and cooperation between countries can be enhanced by trade agreements, particularly when mutual dependence exists. Trade can act as a deterrent to conflict between nations as conflict can make trade difficult. International trade policies are inextricably connected to national welfare, thus loss of positive international economic relations would pose a threat to the welfare of a population and contradict standard economic theory, which dictates that nations maximise their social welfare.

The position of individuals within their society will inevitably impact on the positions Governments take in relation to the evolution of trade and economic policies. Factors such as economic class and the industry in which they are employed will play a major role in how individuals and groups experience and contribute to relevant conflicts. The opposing interests of parties involved in conflicts such as industrial disputes are largely founded in the wealth and class of individuals affected. This has been evident in periods of intense industrialisation. Hence, the unequal distribution of wealth within a national population can exacerbate conflict and hinder negotiations and compromise.

Political battles have created victims in the following countries:

- Britain and Northern Ireland
- The Soviet Union and the United States of America (the 'Cold War')
- North Korea and South Korea
- Iraq and the United States of America and their allies



Satellite channels broadcasting the besieged Iraqi leader among cheering
crowds as US-led troops push toward the capital city.
April 4, 2003

Saddam Hussein
5th President of the Republic of Iraq
2003 Invasion of Iraq

Source: Iraqi News Agency, an organ of the defunct old regime (Wikipedia)



Robert Mugabe in 1991
President of Zimbabwe

*Source: Wikipedia
Author: Mangwanani*



A rare studio photograph of India's "Father of the Nation" Mahatma Gandhi taken in London at the request of Lord Irwin, 1931.

Source: Wikipedia



Nelson Mandela
11th President of South Africa

Source: Wikipedia

2.3 Cultural Conflict

Culture underscores the lives and relationships of individuals, thus it influences both conflict and conflict resolutions. Culture may be defined broadly as a particular race, ethnicity or nationality that shares a set of values, which shape the attitude, perceptions and behaviour of people. Culture contributes to one's identity and provides a sense of belonging. Conflicts may arise when cultural identity and belonging is seen to be threatened or misunderstood. Generalisations and stereotypes regarding particular cultures may form the basis of intractable conflicts. Cultural conflict is inseparable from political and religious conflict because the ways individuals perceive their circumstances is grounded in their own cultural beliefs. Generational conflicts such as those between adults and children are influenced by temporal cultural values. Conflicts in the workplace may stem from differing disciplinary cultures. Cultural values influence views on gender roles and define acceptable methods of communication between individuals.

In resolving cultural conflicts, it is necessary to recognise and accept shared and different identities. Immersion experiences within other cultures may alleviate intolerance and ignorance that cause cultural conflicts if those involved are able to accept cultural differences, rather than make judgements of superiority. Familiarity with other cultures may be a means of taming some conflicts that arise within homes, organisations, communities and nations. Such cultural fluency may reduce suffering as a result of cultural clashes.

The struggle for harmonious relations between the vastly different Aboriginal and British/European cultures within Australia continues today. The differences in concepts of land ownership meant that the British failed to acknowledge that Aborigines see the land as owning them as it is their library, that is, the source of all their customs, ceremonies, laws, food and medicine. Grenville's novel describes the beginning of the destruction of the indigenous civilisation's library, hence their culture.

In Australia each wave of immigrants has been challenged and persecuted to some extent. The post World War II European migrants were put down with derogatory names such as 'wogs' and 'spicks'. In the 1970's and 1980's Asian migrants encountered similar insults with terms such as 'gooks' and 'chinks'. While some of this cultural tension still exists, the use of such racial slurs is thankfully far less tolerated by the majority of society today. This may be partly explained by a greater exposure to the 'new' culture and a recognition and greater acceptance of difference between the ethnic groups.

Such cultural conflicts occur all over the world. An example of a recent cultural conflict that has created victims is in Zimbabwe where the government led by Robert Mugabe has uprooted many white farmers and their families from their land. The history of the United States of America is littered with examples of cultural confrontations: from the North versus South battles of the American Revolution through to segregation issues between 'whites' and negro/African-Americans and in some cities problems between Hispanic groups and other ethnic groups.

Consider similar conflicts which have occurred or are still occurring in the following countries:

- Germany
- Afghanistan
- South Africa
- Ireland
- Rwanda
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Cambodia

2.4 Social Conflict

Within social relationships, conflict may involve a clash between opposing powers operating in a particular society. Social conflicts stem from the values upheld by individuals and social groups and the interests they support and defend against a social authority. The basis for individual judgement of situations is largely dependent on social class and status, through which social power is also attributed. Needs and instincts may fuel social conflict and dissention when the needs of members of minority groups are perceived as insufficiently met. Social conflict yields psychological distress and possibly physical ramifications.

Social structures, such as hierarchies and class systems, have often given way to rebellion with tragic outcomes. Traditional patriarchal and theocratic social systems no longer dominate the social arena evidencing positive changes and growth can occur in the long-term aftermath of social conflicts. The freedoms we enjoy in society today have been the result of conflicts between minority and majority groups. Changing attitudes have liberated future generations from oppression. The experiences of social conflict have strengthened communities and families that have found themselves at odds with social authorities.

The resolution of social conflict is largely dependent on compromise, but threats may be used as a method by which to gain speedier resolution. However, physical violence can be manifested in social conflict when threats are used to create a sense of fear as a tactic of intimidation to gain agreement. Violence may lead to further violence in acts of retaliation and revenge.

Riots are outbreaks of lawlessness where a crowd may erupt in violent public protest, anger or disgust in response to the actions and decisions of authorities or individuals. Racial tensions erupted during the Los Angeles riots in the 1990s, and the Cronulla riots. Grief and fear were motivating factors in the riots in response to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Resolutions reached in circumstances of bargaining, particularly with terrorist organisations, may not last or prevent the conflict from resurfacing in the future. The volatile nature of social conflict means that it is difficult to permanently and peacefully resolve.

The power of collaboration in confronting adversity may be used or abused by those who yield power. Leaders may take advantage of their power in society to manipulate others to serve their own personal agendas. This is exemplified by Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*. In direct contrast, leaders may use their power to improve attitudes and address public issues with reason and honour as evidenced in *Omagh* by Michael Gallagher. Communities and groups may gain strength and hope through collaborative campaigns, such as the Omagh Self Help and Support Group.

One of the positive outcomes of social conflict may be the union and solidarity that creates new bonds between individuals and victimised or marginalised social groups and provides some hope of moving forward. Also, interpersonal relationships may be strengthened through experiences of social conflict. Issues in the marital relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor in *The Crucible* are resolved as their ordeal climaxes. Furthermore, resolution to social conflict is largely dependent on individuals finding peace within themselves and pride in their personal sense of honour and integrity. Social conflicts pose particular challenges for individuals who are forced to choose between conformity and silence, and resistance to oppressive and corrupt authorities.



Prime Minister of Pakistan
Assassinated December 27th, 2007
Source: Wikipedia



David Hicks outside his family home in Salisbury Park, South Australia.
Released from Yatala Labour Prison December 29th, 2007
Source: Wikipedia

Chapter 3

THEMES AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE CONTEXT

3.1 Causes of Conflict

Conflicts commonly stem from a clash of beliefs, ideas, ideologies, principles, expectations or interests.

The different **views and values** that pertain to certain social groups and individuals fabricate the inevitability of social conflicts. When views and values are repressed, defence mechanisms are manifested in the form of conflict as strategies to uphold personal or collective ideals are implemented. Cultural fluency is an increasing phenomenon in our modern world in which globalisation has brought greater familiarity among nations through the acceptance of multicultural societies. Historically, the limited opportunities and strategies to learn about other cultures caused many conflicts. Difficulties in communication meant that much was unknown, thus a fear of the unknown was the cause of much hostility particularly for settlers to new countries, such as America and Australia. When cultural difference is the subject of attack, there is need for acceptance and compromise in order for the needs of opposing parties to be met satisfactorily.

History has demonstrated an inherent need in humans to strive for **power**. Due to competing interests individuals or groups will try to gain advantage over others for their own benefit. In power struggles, the strong are able to survive whereas the weak are exploited and defeated. Majority groups may initiate conflict to defeat minority groups, who are often victims of religious and political persecution. Power can be asserted in different ways. Physical power and strength is used in battles of war and violent confrontations or for the purposes of intimidation. Intellectual power can be a method of manipulation and assertiveness to exercise influence over others and gain social power. Both threats and force may be used in attempts to coerce individuals and groups to relinquish their efforts to obtain superiority. Minority groups often lack the physical and intellectual resources and power needed to protect themselves, thus the more powerful may control the conflict. Power can also be used to enact change, thus the powerful have a capacity to have significant impact on a state of affairs. Battles for power can result in a cycle of conflict in which parties clash at numerous stages in the process of resolving conflict between them.

Conflict may escalate for individuals in the aftermath of major social conflict. Individuals may be thrust into moral dilemmas and be motivated to pursue a conflict as a symptom of their suffering and pain. Vengeance and the pursuit of justice may fuel conflicts further. Resentment and hostility may linger as an individual tries to comprehend the reasons a conflict escalates into violence.

3.2 Responses to Conflict

Individuals and groups respond to conflict in different ways depending on their religious beliefs, cultural and social backgrounds and personal experiences. Appropriate behaviour is after all determined by one's customs and their personal understanding of social norms. State laws and social rules also have some influence on the ways in which people respond to conflict when they encounter it.

In large-scale conflicts, **violence** and aggressive behaviour, such as fighting, beating or killing an opposing party, creates tragic and devastating consequences for nations, communities, families and individuals. Violence may be used against a perceived enemy with the intention of defeat and victory. However, history has shown that the use of violence in attempts to resolve conflict may lead to more violence, thus such reactions to conflict are problematic. The aftermath of bloody battles in war and terrorist attacks can lead to renewed conflict or facilitate peace processes and changes in social attitudes.

In small-scale conflicts between individuals, such as parents and children or marital spouses, responses may vary depending on the nature of the individuals involved who may either fuel or pacify the argument. When couples seek only to please their partner and concede their own personal interests, they may relinquish opportunities for relationship and individual growth.

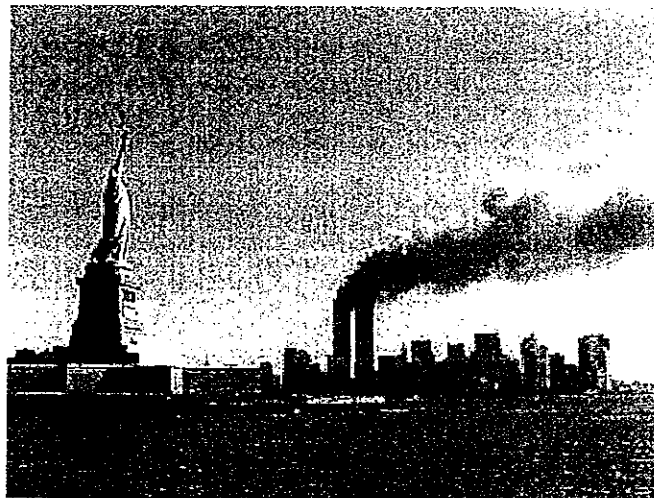
Conflict management involves the capacity to solve problems and accept differences. Collaborating involves sharing one's own views and listening to the views of others. Collaborative responses to conflicts can allow individuals to recognise contrasts and tensions in relationships and viewpoints. In a process of collaboration to resolve a conflict, the primary aim is to reach a mutual agreement. Though constructive discussions take time, effort and commitment, conflict may be prevented in the future if all parties are satisfied. Through compromise and cooperation, parties in conflict may be able to meet in the middle. Compromise reached during negotiations may be facilitated by a mediating party.

Accommodating or obliging by yielding to the opposing view may serve to keep peace, but the potential for a lasting resolution is unlikely through such responses. The option to avoid, delay or withdraw from conflict leaves at least one party with largely unmet needs that originally caused the conflict to arise. In contrast, responses to conflict that attempt to solely control the outcome through manipulation, force or influence may result in victory, but may fuel further conflict in the future by creating latent resentment and hostility.

3.3 Consequences of Conflict

The suffering and tragedy that ensues from violent conflict causes lasting traumatic effects on those involved. In violations of the basic human right to life, the families and communities of deceased victims are left to try to make sense of their loss and seek justice and retribution. The plight of such people may incur further conflict as they encounter obstacles to resolving the inner and interpersonal conflict they subsequently face.

Nonetheless, conflict can serve as a catalyst to improving relations between nations and cultural, political or religious groups. Conflict can have positive impacts on societies and can bring about social change that enriches the lives of individuals. Much of the freedom we enjoy today has been borne of past conflicts. Thus, it is worth considering whether conflict has been a necessity at times. Growth and development of humanity and civilisation is instigated by challenges to social norms, especially those standards which oppress minority groups. Shelter from different ideologies and views may have more detrimental consequences than overt confrontation. The outcomes of challenges and conflicts can often be increased strength and renewed peace within personal relationships, communities and nations.



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fd/National_Park_Service_9-11_Statue_of_Liberty_and_WTC_fire.jpg

The towers of the World Trade Centre burn shortly after United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower on the right. To its left is the still smoking North Tower, struck earlier by American Airlines Flight 11.

3.4 Resolutions of Conflict

In order to resolve conflict, agreement must be reached between opposing parties. In each of the set texts for this Context, the authors present conflicts on different levels and offer messages about resolution of conflict.

Solutions are dependent on accommodation or compromise as the nature of conflict is often that vastly different views are defended. Methods of persuasion to gain agreement from opposition in conflict vary from violent battles to the pacifist protest, such as that of The Quakers. Such groups prefer to avoid conflict on the basis of religious beliefs that uphold the value of pacifism. Individuals may prefer to avoid confrontation because of their own personal nature.

A third party may be required when conflict has reached a stalemate. The United Nations has played a fundamental role in the capacity of providing peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance to achieve some resolution of global and national conflicts. Resolution and peace can only be achieved when there is alleviation of perceived threats. Truces and treaties, such as the International Declaration of Human Rights, are instruments designed to achieve resolution of conflict.

Conflict resolution requires communication. Family and friends have a greater chance of resolving interpersonal conflict if grievances and concerns are aired. On an extra-personal level, nations may cease conflict through negotiations and the signing of peace agreements. Through debate and reconciliation, conflict can be a catalyst for change rather than a source of death and destruction.

The durability of the resolution is largely dependent on whether core differences between conflicting parties have been resolved sufficiently. If both parties are satisfied with the outcome of negotiations, the resolution is more likely to last into the future and prevent the conflict from resurfacing in the future.

Chapter 5

TEXT 2: THE SECRET RIVER

5. 1 Themes

5. 1.1. Conflict caused by social hierarchies

The first part of the novel provides a view of the English class system from a member of the underclass. William Thornhill clearly perceives the rigid demarcations of the social hierarchy. The consequences of this strict social order led to the large numbers of criminals that spilled from London jails to the new distant colony of Australia. The most disadvantaged class succumbed to acts of crime in order to meet their basic needs of food and shelter.

Social classes denote appropriate behaviour and can serve to maintain social order. Though such social structures are intended to prevent conflict, when the lower classes are severely oppressed by those in positions of superiority, conflict may arise. William Thornhill's frustration stems from his observation that he holds little hope of elevating his status despite his dedication to hard work. Furthermore, there was some confusion and frustration for the convicts and authorities in the new colony as the social class system seemed to blur in the pioneer years.

The social class system is seen to breed the desire in individuals to place themselves in superior positions to others. William and Sal delight in their opportunity to be masters to their convict worker, Dan Oldfield. The convicts eagerly place the natives below them in terms of social status, thus creating a new link at the bottom of the chain of oppression with indigenous people at the very bottom. The social structure that is inherent in their culture is applied in the new colony as it had been in their homeland. Though Thornhill observes that the Aborigines behave more in the manner of gentry who do little work to obtain food, he nonetheless uses what he knows to measure and place the new people around him in Australia.

The pressure from others, such as William Thornhill's neighbours on the Hawkesbury River, created social conflict amongst the white convict settlers. Their aggressive suggestions on how to resolve the cultural and geographical conflict clashed with the more pacifist and empathetic approach of neighbours such as Blackwood, who is ultimately isolated for behaving compassionately towards the natives. This social conflict was not only restricted to the British convicts but inevitably the indigenous community would have been divided about methods of resolving the conflicts they encountered.

The expectations of the British settlers are evident in their view of Australia as 'terra nullus'. They believed that the land was 'empty' or unoccupied, thus they perceived that it was available to them at their will. However, the native population in the early nineteenth century observed with curious placidity until the white settlers attacked in violent frustration. Both parties tried to hold onto their own expectations to satisfy their needs and wants. The British expected the indigenous people they encountered to give up their land easily, which was symptomatic of the placement of indigenous people in a lower social class. The creation of this additional and lower class gave the relatively powerless convicts a sense of superiority, which in many cases fuelled the violent confrontations between the two groups as the Aborigines expected that their vital connection to their 'country' (tribal land) would be respected.

5.1.2 Conflict between cultures

Grenville's novel is dedicated to "the Aboriginal people of Australia: past, present and future." The novel is her attempt to capture a moment in the history of the nation when two contrasting cultures met and British settlers started to tame the land Aborigines had inhabited peacefully for thousands of years. The settlers largely held the expectation that their lives could continue in similar ways to which they were accustomed in England. *The Secret River* illustrates the clash between Aboriginal culture and that of British settlers. The conflict is predominantly focused on the ownership of land, which traditionally forms the basis of Aboriginal culture and identity. The settlers and Aborigines defended opposing values. The British valued personal ownership of a piece of land marked by fences and garden plots. The indigenous people found that the invasion of their tribal lands was reducing their sources of food and medicine, but most significantly destroying their cultural records.

Miscommunication was a tremendous source of increasing hostility. The language barrier meant that settlers and natives could not understand and discuss the situation they found themselves in. Without verbal communication, there was little opportunity to understand the different values and cultures both parties sought to uphold. This lack of understanding of language, customs and ideologies contributed to the escalation of conflict. Rumours and myths spread rapidly amongst white settlers, who readily believed that the natives were murderous cannibals. Fear and distrust was bred through misunderstanding and miscommunication. Thornhill's attempts to communicate with Whisker Harry show some willingness to reach an understanding though the success of the interaction was unclear."

The new settlers feared the very different way of life they observed the natives leading. Also, the Aboriginal people looked physically different; they dressed and behaved differently, thus they were labelled "savages". This condescension was formalised on a governmental level with permission given to shoot natives if necessary. The absence of the acceptance of multiculturalism in society gave rise to attitudes of arrogance and superiority towards the indigenous Australians. Aboriginal culture was clearly deemed inferior and odd in comparison to British culture. In the future, this attitude would lead to governmental policies of assimilation that created the tragedy of the Stolen Generations.

This continues today with current issues such the implementation of the government intervention in the Northern Territory. This government act is another way in which the government seeks to dispossess indigenous Australians of their land.

5.2 Structure

The Secret River is divided into six parts. Grenville creates some suspense by opening the novel with a snapshot of William Thornhill when he first arrives in Australia in the aptly titled prologue, "Strangers". The narrative then takes the reader back to Thornhill's impoverished childhood in London and details his journey through poverty, misfortune, crime and punishment, which brings him to Australia. The majority of the novel is set in New South Wales and follows Thornhill and his family from the colony to the Hawkesbury River where he finally settles. The epilogue, "Thornhill's Place", reveals the consequences and aftermath of the violent battle for William Thornhill and his family.

5.3 Style

The Secret River is a novel of historical fiction about convict settlement in New South Wales, Australia. Though it is a work of fiction, it is based on fact and some actual historical events. The text was inspired by research into the author's own family history and invites the reader into the pioneer world to examine a defining moment in Australian history. Grenville explores the nature of human beings by presenting a series of decisions which shape the lives of individuals, families and communities. She invites readers to stand in the shoes of the characters and consider the reasons for and influences on their decisions, representatively those of William Thornhill.

Kate Grenville started with history, but did not produce a historical recount as she made adaptations to characters to suit the purposes of fictional narrative. The names Grenville has selected for characters contain both irony and historical significance. Furthermore, Thornhill's boat is ironically named the *Hope*.

Grenville describes elements of the Australian landscape, such as the land and the sun, in vivid detail. She recreates the landscape of the frontier as it appeared to the convict settlers and native Aborigines in the early nineteenth century. The landscape presented many challenges to the new settlers, who tried to convert their land to the types of properties they were accustomed to in England. Grenville paints a clear picture of the enormity and intimidating nature of the land. Thornhill's "hut was hardly visible in its patch of beaten ground. Around it were the bulges of the forest, shadowed even in the brightest sun, a tangle of light and shade, rock and leaf." The impenetrable nature of the landscape to white settlers is contrasted with the ease with which the black natives move silently and effortlessly. Grenville also makes frequent reference to shadows and sunlight as symbols of oppression and freedom respectively.

Grenville uses dialogue sparingly, but the words of her characters are largely drawn from authentic historical records. Thus, she is able to capture the eloquence of the gentry and the drawl of the poorly educated lower classes. Interestingly, the Aboriginal characters very rarely speak at all, symbolising the historical silencing of the native people by white settlement. The language barrier further brings to light the cultural differences and minimal communication, which both fuelled the conflict between settlers and natives.

5.4 Major and Minor Characters

5.4.1 The Thornhills

William Thornhill is born into a life of poverty as a member of an underclass family with too many mouths to feed. His early life is marred by constant hunger, cold and degradation. His values are shaped by his experiences on the bottom of the English class system. As a child, Thornhill learns quickly to defend himself physically and harbours anger at his inability to elevate his social position. He engages in petty theft to overcome the scarcity of food. His frustration is evident: "What point could there be in hoping, when everything could be broken so easily?" Thornhill is a hard worker and comes to enjoy working on the water when he is apprenticed by Sal's father.

His occupation is an inescapable symptom of his social status which follows him overseas to Australia where he is sent for trying to steal a load of timber from his employer. Nonetheless, relegation to the new British colony saves him from certain death at the hands of an executioner who had sentenced him to be hanged. He arrives in New South Wales in 1806 with his wife, Sal, and their children.

In London, Thornhill and Sal find solace and "comfortable common ground" in their friendship, which develops romantically into a happy marriage, which is challenged once again by poverty after the death of Sal's parents. Sal follows her husband to the frontier and tolerates the major differences to her homeland though she never overcomes her homesickness and eventually plants an English garden in the house Thornhill builds.

Thornhill grapples with his predicament: he cannot return to poverty in London and wants to seize the potential to create personal wealth in Australia. He yearns for his own piece of land and at some cost to his family life, he settles by the Hawkesbury River at Thornhill's Point, a prime riverfront property. In order to quash Sal's desire to return to England and escape fear of the natives, Thornhill must decide whether to participate in a massacre of the natives surrounding his property. He feels he has little choice as he wants to keep his family intact. Ironically, his decision creates a tacit distance in his marriage and one of his sons chooses to leave the family home to live with a neighbour.

Thornhill's life is characterised by moral decisions in order to attain ownership of land and the dignity he perceives as coming with it. Thornhill's dilemmas are based on basic needs, such as feeding and supporting his family, however he acknowledges that, "a man never knew what kind of stuff he was made of, until the situation arose to bring it out of him." He and Sal enjoy their new-found power as masters over Dan Oldfield, a newly arrived prisoner Thornhill had selected to work on his property of one hundred acres.

5.4.2 *The British settlers*

The main social conflict in the text exists in the form of hostility between the white settlers and the black natives. The settlers hold the expectation that the land is available to them freely yet the reality is that the land has belonged to the Darug people for forty thousand years. In the physical battle, there are primitive fights with spears and muskets. The indigenous people are shot or poisoned as the settlers assert their dominance, power and superiority. Some settlers, such as Smasher Sullivan, support the notion of shooting Aborigines on the basis of their perceived worthlessness in a cultural comparison. Characters such as Sullivan, Sagitty Birtles and Mrs Herring are based on Grenville's research into actual settlers and represent real people.

In contrast, Blackwood represents the settlers who defended the rights of the Aboriginal people and tried to offer some protection. His advice to his neighbours on the Hawkesbury River was to "give a little, take a little." Thornhill's son, Dick, chooses to live with Blackwood after his father's involvement in the massacre of the natives.

The settlers, especially those on the edge of the settlement, experienced the harsh reality of frontier life. The banks of the Hawkesbury River were considered the frontier and the challenges of life for the Thornhill family and their neighbours increased the tension and fear that escalated into a bloody confrontation.

5.4.3 *Indigenous Australians*

The ancient history of the indigenous people of Australia brought about a highly complex social system in which roles and relationships are clearly stipulated. There are clearly defined places within the tribal community from the moment of birth. Responsibility for children is shared amongst adults of the tribal group and strict social rules apply. Customs include ceremonies, such as funerals and initiation rites, which involve traditional elements such as body painting, fire and dancing. Grenville describes in detail the different weapons used in battle by the opposing parties and the injuries inflicted by both spears and guns.

Indigenous society embodies a vastly different social structure to the British class system, particularly with regards to the role of women. The settlers, many of whom were uneducated convicts had no capacity for understanding cultural differences and passed judgement on the natives as "savages" and an inferior human class. Most importantly, there is a fundamental difference in their perception of the world and the land, which results in violent battles.

Upon arrival of white settlers to their land, the indigenous people initially showed curiosity which was non-confrontational. They are quickly and adversely impacted on by the commodities imported from Britain, such as alcohol and sugar. Alcoholism has dire consequences on both indigenous individuals and their communities as Aboriginal men are predominantly debilitated by the consumption of alcohol.



A 19th century engraving of an Indigenous Australian encampment, showing the indigenous mode of life in the cooler parts of Australia at the time of European settlement.

Source: Wikipedia - Illustration from "Australia in the 1870s" by Edwin Carton Booth, Virtue and Co, 1873

5.5 Important Quotes and Passages

- Consider William Thornhill's defensive point of view on page 6.

"He had died once, in a manner of speaking. He could die again. He had been stripped of everything already: he had only known the dirt under his bare feet, his small grip on this unknown place. He had nothing but that, and those helpless sleeping humans in the hut behind him. He was not about to surrender them to any naked black man."

- Consider William Thornhill's source of solace in the face of cold, hunger and poverty on page 15.

"He grew up a fighter. By the time he was ten years old the other boys knew to leave him alone. The rage warmed him and filled him up. It was a kind of friend."

- Consider William Thornhill's view of the social hierarchy on page 26.

"He had a sudden dizzying understanding of the way men were ranged on top of each other, all the way from the Thornhills at the bottom up to the King, or God, at the top, each man higher than one, lower than another."

- Consider William Thornhill's plight because of his social class on page 32.

"In any race for survival with this Henry, Thornhill knew he would have been the victor; lad though he was -- shipwrecked, for instance, the dandy would have pined and drooped and died, while he himself would have known how to prosper. And yet, in this particular desert isle of London, this jungle full of dangerous creatures in 1793, Thornhill was at the mercy of such mincing pansies, who looked at him as if he were of no more account than a bollard."

- Consider William Thornhill's dilemma on page 55.

"He knew what the feeling was called: it was fear. But fear was not enough to stop anyone lifting objects from their owners. It was just part of a lighterman's life, like his wet feet. The problem was simple: fear did not pay the rent."

- Consider William and Sal's relationship as a source of comfort in a foreign, distant land on page 85.

"Many things in this place were bewildering, but the feel of her body was still the thing he knew best in all the world."

- Consider the cultural differences between the settlers and the natives on page 93.

"There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said *this is mine*. No house that said, *this is our home*. There were no fields or flocks that said, *we have put the labour of our hands into this place*."

"But there was no point dwelling on the spears of the blacks. They were like the snakes or the spiders, not something that could be guarded against. He reminded her that even in London a man might be killed for his pocketbook. He meant it as a kind of reassurance, but Sal went silent. He came to dread seeing the *Gazette* spread out on the table."

- Consider William Thornhill's personal desire to own a piece of land on page 107.

"A chaos opened up inside him, a confusion of wanting...He let himself imagine it: standing on the crest of that slope, looking down over his own place. Thornhill's Point. It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say *mine*, in a way he had never been able to say *mine* of anything at all. He had not known until this minute that it was something he wanted so much."

- Compare William Thornhill's attitude towards the land to that of Aborigines on pages 140 and 141.

"A tent was all very well, but what marked a man's claim was a rectangle of cleared and dug-over dirt and something growing that had not been there before. He had corn seeds, a pick, an axe, a spade. It was a matter of choosing a patch of ground and opening it up to the sky."

"Thornhill stared at the patch of dirt, drying grey now the sun was on it. Dick would be right, he thought. except that everyone knew the blacks did not plant things. They wandered about, taking food as it came under their hand. They might grub things out of the dirt if they happened on them, or pick something off a bush as they passed. But, like children, they did not plant today so that they could eat tomorrow. It was why they were called savages."

- Consider William Thornhill's unchanging status as a member of the underclass on page 173.

"In an instant the glories of Port Jackson became a prison once more, the sunlight lost its colour, the closed-in township became a poisonous place where a man might choke to death. He could buy the pardon, he could get the land, he could fill his strongbox with money. But he could not buy what Suckling had. No matter how shabby Suckling became, no matter how far gone in drink, he would always be able to hold his head up high, a man who had never worn the stripes."

- Consider the choice faced by the men on page 298 and William Thornhill on page 299.

"...*We must grasp the nettle, painful though it may be, or else abandon the place to the treacherous savages and return to our former lives.* There was a silence in which they all thought of their former lives."

"How could he choose, between his wife and his place? Making things so that she would stay was worth any price."

- Consider William Thornhill's predicament on pages 300 and 301.

"How had his life funnelled down to this corner, in which he had so little choice? His life had funnelled down once before, in Newgate, into the dead-end of the condemned cell. But the thing that lay ahead of him there had been out of his hands. There was a kind of innocence in waiting for Mr Executioner.

The difference with this was that he was choosing it, of his own free will.

The noose would have ended his life, but what he was about to do would end it too. Whichever choice he made, his life would not go on as it had before...

He and Sal could argue the toss for the rest of their lives. She would not stay, he would not go."

- Consider William Thornhill's "pang" for his homeland despite his achievements on page 329.

"But there was an emptiness as he watched Jack's hand caressing the dirt. This was something he did not have: a place that was part of his flesh and spirit. There was no part of the world he would keep coming back to, the way Jack did, just to feel it under him."